

4 March 1959

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

**SUBJECT: Countries Likely to Participate with the USSR in
General War Against the US**

REFERENCE: NSC 5904, Draft dated 19 February 1959

1. We cannot predict the circumstances and context within which general war might come. It is possible that in certain circumstances some or all of the European and Asian satellites and Communist China would attempt to stand aside. The chances are slight that the European satellites and North Korea would in fact be able to deny the USSR use of military bases and lines of communication, or to withhold their own forces from combat if such action were desired by the USSR. However, the positions of Communist China and North Vietnam are quite different. We believe that Communist China does have sufficient independence, and that North Vietnam is sufficiently remote, so that they could take courses of action based on their own interests.

~~TOP SECRET~~

2. As our estimates have indicated, we believe that general war would be most likely to develop from a situation of local tension or conflict. In the event of a general war which developed out of a crisis situation in the Far East, it is almost certain that Communist China would be immediately and directly involved. In circumstances where the major hostility arose from a local crisis in the Middle East or Western Europe, Communist China's immediate and direct involvement could not be assumed. In the course of that crisis, some indication of Communist China's decision might emerge.

3. One must also take into consideration that the Soviets would place such a premium on achieving maximum surprise, that they would not feel it desirable to alert the Satellites or even China, much less ask them to make preparations for war. Under these circumstances, general war might come about without the Satellites or even China having an opportunity to decide in advance whether they should join in.

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4. In the circumstance of a Soviet attack on the US, it might be difficult to determine at once whether Communist China was in fact participating. We note, however, that for the next few years, at least, Communist China is not likely to have a significant nuclear capability. Accordingly, the additional threat posed by Communist China might not be so great as to require immediate US strikes against the China mainland.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Assistant Director
National Estimates

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